

In The Claims:

Please amend claims 1 and 19, so that the claims hereafter read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A composition comprising:
a thixotropic gel; and
an antimicrobial agent contained in the thixotropic gel;
wherein the thixotropic gel is characterized by:

- (i) free easy flow upon the application of a threshold level under the shear forces imparted by a conventional medical syringe such that the composition may be instilled into, and withdrawn from, a hemodialysis catheter using such a conventional medical syringe;

- (ii) sufficient cohesiveness such that, when the composition is moved through the lumen of a hemodialysis catheter using a conventional medical syringe, the composition advances through the lumen as a cohesive rod-shaped mass; and

- (iii) when the composition is disposed within the lumen of a hemodialysis catheter which is installed in the vascular system of a patient, the composition remains in the lumen ~~substantially without leakage;~~ and

wherein the thixotropic gel is biocompatible and biodegradable in blood.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel is a hydrogel.

4. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel is a microgel.

5. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent is taurolidine, taurultam or a mixture thereof.

6. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel also contains a medically acceptable anticoagulant agent.

7. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the composition contains salicylic acid or one of its salts.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Withdrawn) A locking agent for an indwelling catheter that is composed of a thixotropic gel or a colloidal fluid that is retained in the catheter with minimal loss during instillation and/or the duration between uses of the catheter and can be instilled and withdrawn using a syringe.

10. (Withdrawn) A catheter lock solution according to claim 9 in which the agent is albumin.

11. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the hydrogel is a natural polymer.

12. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 11 wherein the natural polymer comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of: serum albumin; collagen; and alginates.

13. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the hydrogel is a synthetic polymer.

14. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 13 wherein the synthetic polymer comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of: polyvinyl alcohol; poly(ethylene oxide); poly(hydroxyethylene); and a polyelectrolyte.

15. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 14 wherein the polyelectrolyte comprises at least one from the group consisting of: poly(acrylic acid); poly(styrene sulfonate); and carboxymethylcellulose (CMC).

16. (Withdrawn) A system comprising:
a hemodialysis catheter; and
a catheter lock comprising a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

17. (Withdrawn) A method for providing microbe-free access to the vascular system of a patient, the method comprising the steps of:
providing a hemodialysis catheter;
deploying the hemodialysis catheter into the vascular system of a patient; and

sealing the hemodialysis catheter with a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

18. (Withdrawn) A method for preventing microbial colonization of a lumen of a catheter placed within a patient, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein; and

sealing the catheter with the catheter lock.

19. (Currently Amended) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel is a colloidal dispersion ~~suspension~~.

20. (Withdrawn) A system according to claim 16 wherein the catheter is a hemodialysis catheter.